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2020 West Virginia University Potomac State College Brand Equity Study

University Relations

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BRAND EQUITY STUDY

October 2020



WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY RELATIONS

BACKGROUND

WVU Potomac State College, one of three campuses that comprise the West Virginia University System, is located in Keyser, West Virginia. The College, whose total student population is approximately 1,100, primarily offers two-year programs, which the majority of students take advantage of. It also offers a handful of four-year programs.

The School wants to create a more effective brand strategy but must first understand students' rational for choosing it. In an effort to do so, quantitative research was conducted to gauge students' perceptions of the School.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An online survey ran in eNews, and it was subsequently posted on social media and sent via students' MIX account. Upon completion of the survey, students could enter a contest to win one of five branded prize-packs. The survey elicited nearly 200 responses.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION

WVU Potomac State College offers students a personalized, supportive academic experience in a beautiful, mountainous setting. It's a welcoming and affordable school that is perfect for students seeking a more intimate classroom setting and a personal connection with faculty. The supportive nature of this environment helps students thrive, whether their goal is to seek immediate employment or a four-year degree at a larger school.

The Value

The College offers a great education provided by highly-qualified and supportive faculty at a cost that won't saddle students with debt - whether they are pursuing a two-year or four-year degree.

"Potomac State College is an amazing place to start your degree it offers smaller class sizes and more personal interactions. It's an amazing place to start."

The Environment

Its small size lends itself to a comfortable, close-knit community that enables students to quickly feel at home, yet part of something bigger.

"A very integrated and collective environment where students can learn more about themselves and others in a caring and compassionate environment."

The Academics

Small class sizes provide the opportunity for students to forge close relationships with faculty who care about the success of their students.

"VERY dedicated instructors, every single one I have come into contact with has been truly passionate about the subject they are teaching. I am speaking of the staff as well...as much if not more at times, I am NOT exaggerating. I know this school cares about me and my future and it means a lot to me."

The Campus

Its small, but beautiful and quiet campus is the perfect backdrop for a stress-free learning environment that allows students to better focus on academics, as well as eliminate the hassles of navigating a sprawling campus.

"Potomac State College has a smaller campus and smaller classroom sizes. It's a comfortable and peaceful environment. The view of from the quad is so beautiful as well."

UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION

The College is thought the ideal stepping stone for students to earn a 4-year degree – which most are planning to subsequently earn at the Morgantown campus. By first attending PSC, they can save money, get used to a college environment, and build the confidence they need to achieve academic success at a larger school.

Students identified these positive qualities as well:

Attribute

Small class size

Affordable

Small campus

Quiet/peaceful

Qualified faculty

Benefit

Individualized attention

Easier adjustment to college

Greater involvement

Easier to learn

Good value for the money

Low/no debt

Familial, friendly, supportive

Able to focus on academics

Great education, better outcome

UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION

Beliefs about WVU PCS's campus are strongest in the following areas:

	Strongly/somewhat agree
The small class sizes at the College enable students to forge supportive relationships with faculty.	93%
The College's smaller class size helps students thrive.	93%
The College's small size gives students the feeling that they matter.	87%
The college is a small college with the resources of a major university.	87%
The full-time faculty at the College are highly qualified.	87%
The college is a stepping stone to the Morgantown campus.	86%

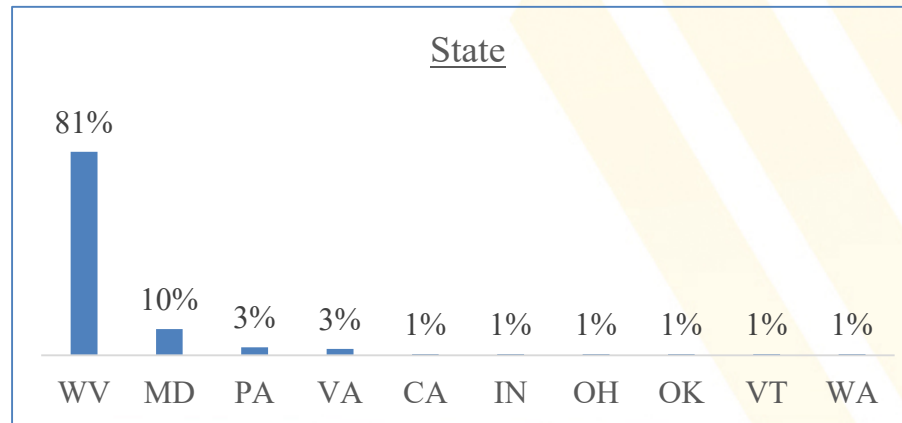
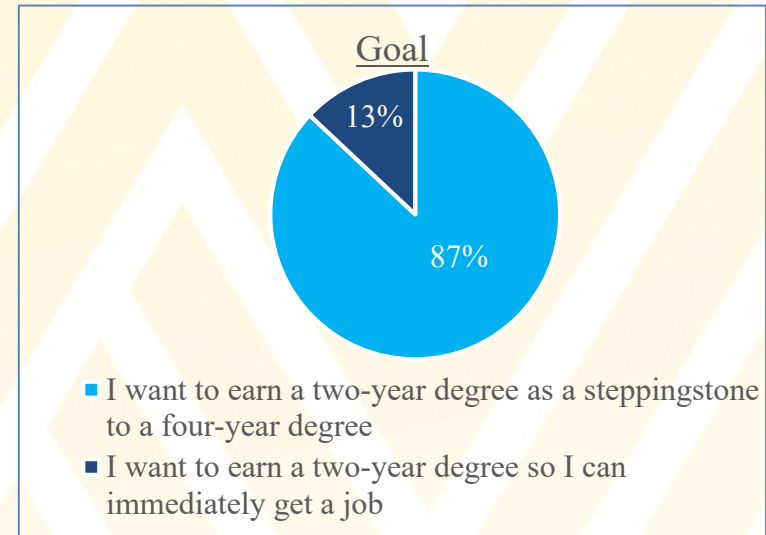
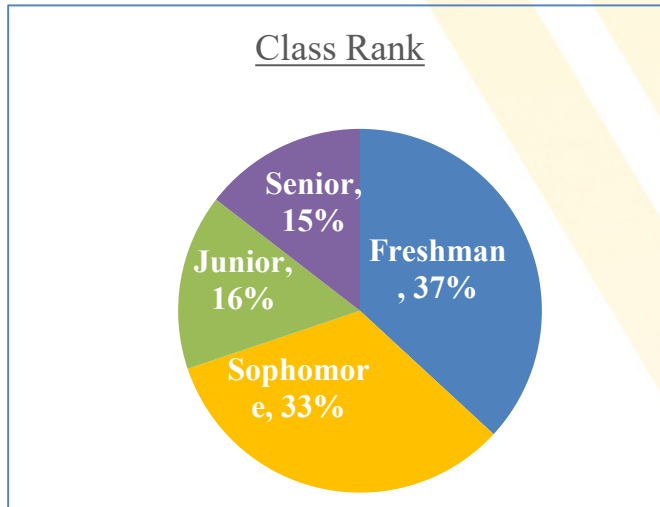
BRAND AWARENESS

Featuring these benefits on the Schools' website is one way to introduce prospective students to the School, but it is not the most effective vehicle for increasing brand awareness. It is vastly more important to build and maintain strong relationships with high school counselors, parents of prospective students and local alumni through effective communications and events. Friends are another important resource to reach when trying to increase awareness.

DETAILED FINDINGS

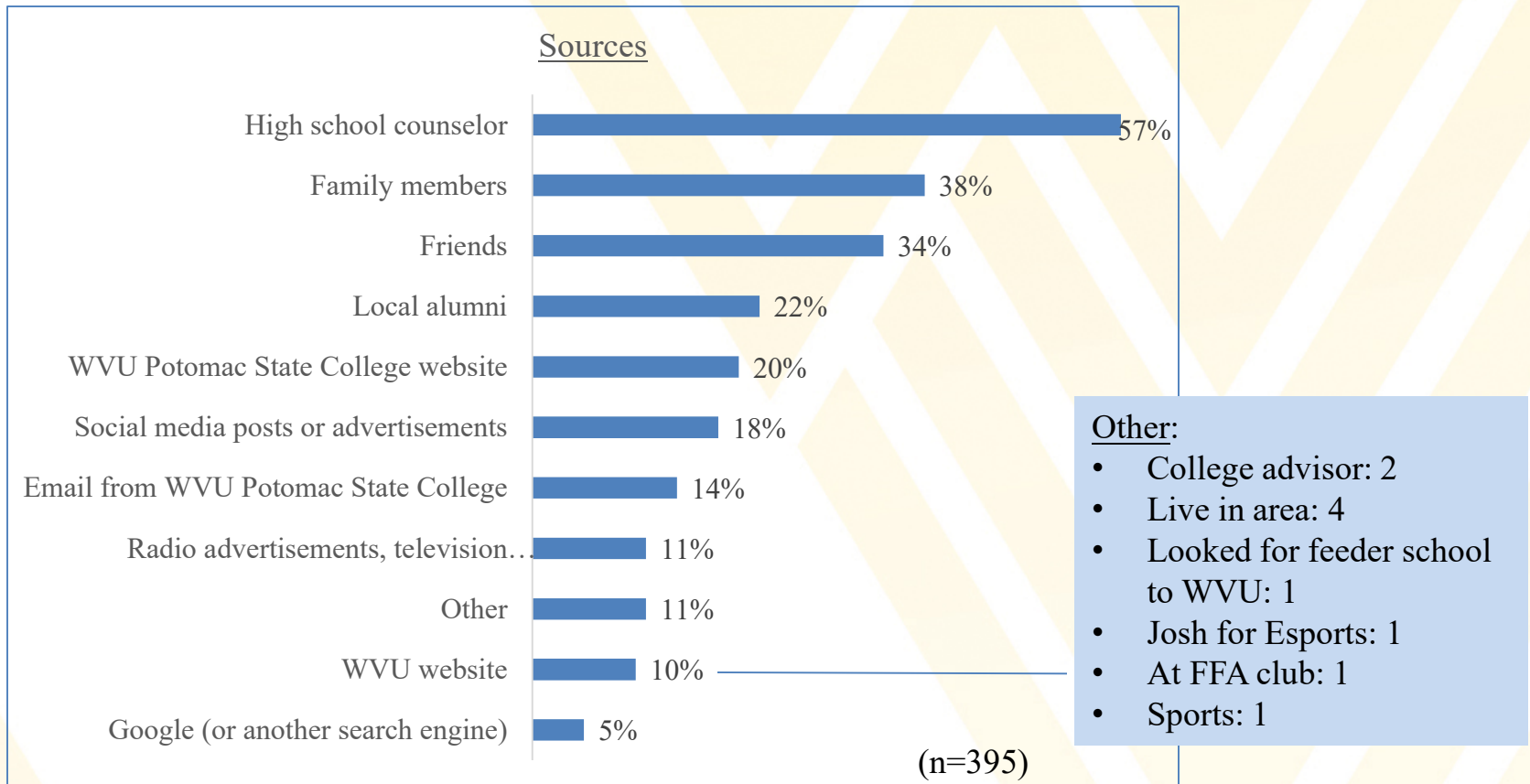
PARTICIPANTS

Seven in ten students who responded to the survey are freshmen or sophomores. The remainder are juniors (16%) and seniors (15%). All but 13% of students at WVU PSC want to earn a two-year degree as a stepping stone to a four-year degree.



AWARENESS

Students learned about WVU PSC through a variety of sources. However, about six in ten (57%) learned of it through their high school counselor. Other top sources of awareness – family members and friends – were cited by 36% and 34% of students, respectively.



The words/phrases students used most often when describing the College are small (in a positive sense), home and family. Affordability, community and awesome are top mentions as well.



“Small classes allowing teachers to give more attention to their students.” – Senior

“Small college but quality education that is affordable!” – Freshman

“More personal learning.” - Junior

WORD ASSOCIATIONS (continued)

Still others touted the quality of the College's faculty, as well as the campus itself.

"The outstanding teachers and the atmosphere in the classrooms" - Junior

"A beautiful school with awesome professors!" - Sophomore

"An awesome campus." - Junior

"Small and beautiful." - Freshman

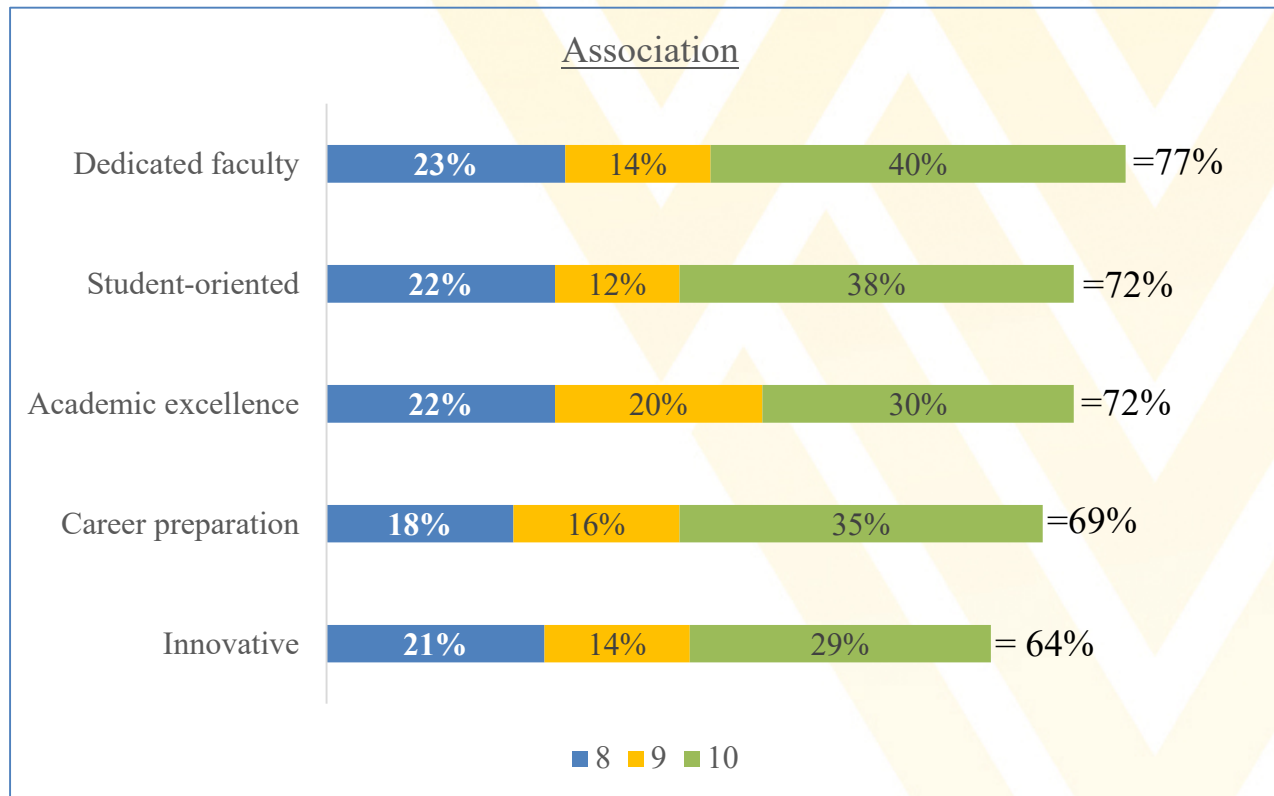


Q. What one word or short phrase comes to mind when you think of WVU Potomac State College?

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY RELATIONS

CHARACTERISTICS

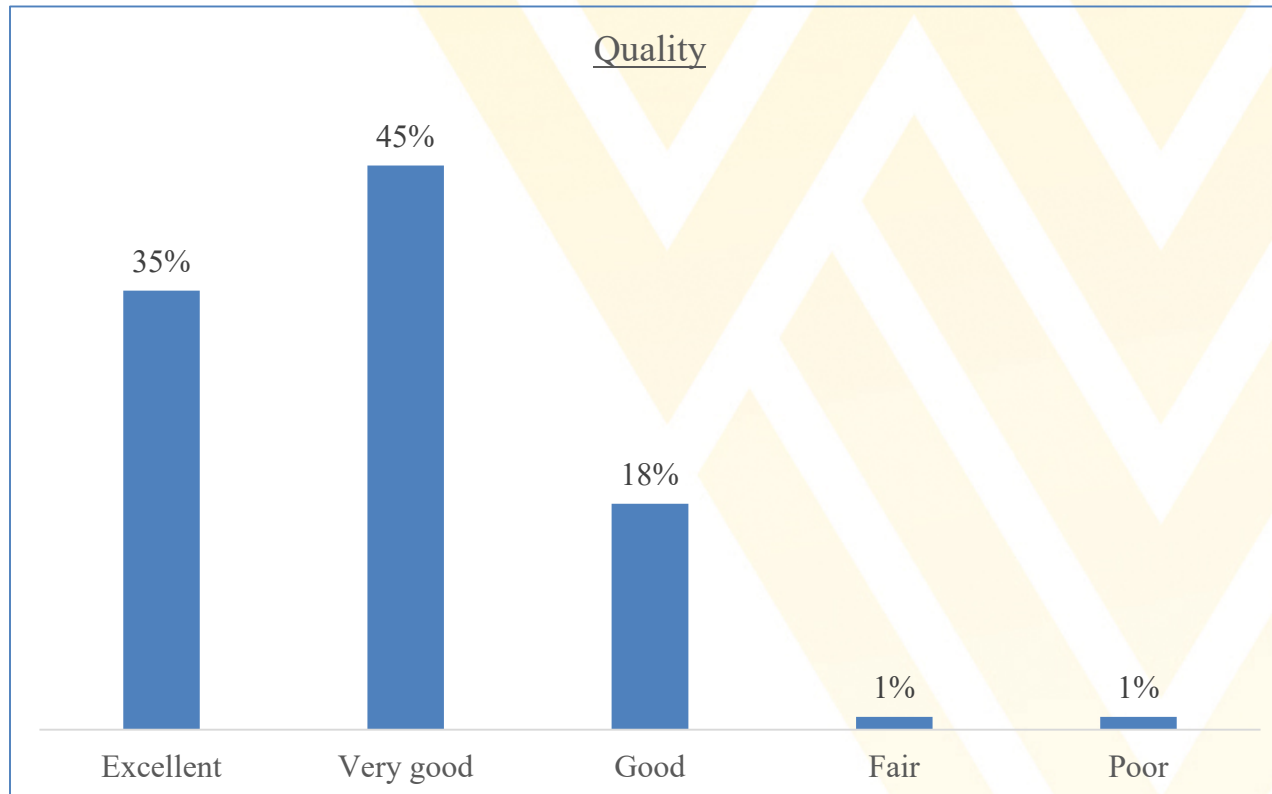
Of the five characteristics listed below, most (77%) closely associate “dedicated faculty” with WVU Potomac State College, and about seven in ten (72%) think of the College as being student-oriented and having excellent academics. Slightly fewer (69%) feel the School makes them career-ready. They feel less strongly about pairing the College with term “innovative.”



Q. Please indicate how closely you associate each word or phrase with WVU Potomac State College. Use a scale from 0 to 10 where "10" means you associate it very closely with WVU and "0" means you don't associate it at all with WVU Potomac State. You can use any number in between.

QUALITY OF ACADEMICS

Eight in ten students (80%) rate the quality of PSC academics as excellent or very good. Another 18% said the education is good. Just 2% believe the quality of academics at WVU Potomac State College is fair to poor.



DESCRIPTIVES

In all but three cases, at least eight in ten students strongly or somewhat agreed with fourteen points of validation regarding WVU Potomac State College characteristics.

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree
The College has a strong reputation for quality academics.	47%	36%
The College has strong athletic programs.	32%	33%
The College's students are highly satisfied with their college experience.	37%	43%
The College is focused on career preparation.	48%	36%
The College is a stepping stone to the Morgantown campus.	64%	22%
The small class sizes at the College enable students to forge supportive relationships with faculty.	80%	13%
The College has a strong school spirit	45%	29%



DESCRIPTIVES (continued)

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree
The environment at the College conveys a sense of belonging/family.	51%	32%
The college offers great value for the money.	57%	24%
The college is a small college with the resources of a major university.	59%	28%
The full-time faculty at the College are highly qualified.	52%	35%
The College's small size gives students the feeling that they matter.	64%	23%
The College's smaller class size helps students thrive.	68%	25%
The College offers more unique majors than its competitors.	37%	27%



SINGLE BEST REASON TO ATTEND PSC

Students were asked the single best reason for someone to attend WVU PSC, and those attributes mentioned most were:

- Cost
- Welcoming
- Good education
- Small class size
- Comfortable
- Supported

Verbatims can be found on the next three pages of this report.



SINGLE BEST REASON TO ATTEND PSC (continued)

Cost (57)

- Affordable
- Saves money
- Low debt
- Value

- *"It has great professors and opportunities with smaller class sizes for a fraction of the price compared to other 4 year universities."*
- *"It is a cheaper start for your college experience while you figure out what you need."*
- *"It is a great place to get a great education at an affordable cost.."*
- *"It is smaller and less expensive and a great way to save money in order to transfer to WVU or any other college."*
- *"it is WVU but more reasonably priced."*
- *"Potomac State is affordable. If you can come here to get all your introductory courses out of the way and not pay a lot of money, Potomac State is a great choice."*
- *"To save money, have a good experience, and to feel welcome."*
- *"It's much more affordable then the Morgantown campus and you still get a full college experience"*

Non-intimidating (23)

- Preparation for a bigger college
- Introduction to college
- A way to start small

- *"For my opinion I think it's the class size, if anybody wants to start small for their first two years of college. Potomac state is a really good option"*
- *"A small college like PSC helps you get prepared for bigger colleges like WVU Morgantown."*
- *"Cheaper and you feel more at home and really get that one on one time if you need it."*
- *"Great stepping stone started in a small comfortable learning environment toward something greater.."*
- *"If they want to earn there Associates degree and get a job right away or use this school to move on to the main campus in Morgantown."*



SINGLE BEST REASON TO ATTEND PSC

Small Class Size (50)

- Easier to learn/focus
- Personal attention
- Not just a number
- Easier transition

- *“It is a small campus, and it feels more like home than home actually does. The classes are smaller and you feel more involved in class rather than being overlooked and ignored. The professor's, staff, maintenance workers, lunch ladies, janitor's administration and RA's are all really easy to get along with and they are always super helpful when you ask them questions; they do not let you feel ignored.”*
- *“Plus, since the classes are smaller, each student has more of a chance for one-on-one attention if they need help.”*
- *“Small class sizes for more one on one relationships with professors and ability to feel important among the whole school.”*
- *“Smaller class sizes make the transition from high school to college easier.”*
- *“The one on one interactions with professors helps the students thrive.”*
- *“Professors actually know your name, your goals, and the extracurricular activities you're involved in. With small class sizes, you get to really know your classmates and therefore, make lifelong friends! The small campus really does give off a sense of home and family!”*

Good education (13)

- *“To meet new people and get a great education.”*
- *“Quality education and you don't have to travel too far from home.”*
- *“Low-cost, but superior education.”*
- *“It offers a quality college education just on a much smaller scale.”*
- *“Increasing GPA, while receiving a high quality education.”*
- *“It is a great place to get a great education at an affordable cost.”*



SINGLE BEST REASON TO ATTEND PSC

Comfortable/Supported (12)

- Feel at home
- Easier to connect with students/faculty
- Sense of belonging

- *“It is a small campus and it makes you feel as though you belong.”*
- *“It is a small campus, and it feels more like home than home actually does. The classes are smaller and you feel more involved in class rather than being overlooked and ignored. The professor's, staff, maintenance workers, lunch ladies, janitor's administration and RA's are all really easy to get along with and they are always super helpful when you ask them questions; they do not let you feel ignored.”*
- *“It isn't a giant party school. You can actually focus on your grades and feel at home while not doing things to possibly hurt you, your education, or even career.”*
- *“Same classes as a larger university, but with lower amount of students. This allows everyone to learn at their own pace, but still be successful in what they want to accomplish.”*
- *“Small classes, personal touch. You are not at it alone here. (it can feel that way in larger schools, in my opinion).”*
- *“To have a great community on your side.”*
- *“You feel welcome and cared for every time you go to class”.*
- *“We're a close knit family. We come together in a time of need and support each other.”*



The words students would use to describe WVU Potomac State College to someone echo those used to describe the best reason they choose to attend the school:



VERBATIMS BY CLASS

FRESHMAN

- *“It's a small town college that has access to many resources of the larger Morgantown Campus but with more personal learning from professors to the students.”*
- *“I would tell them that PSU offers the most bang for your buck when compared with other local choices for education. The campus and its staff are both comfortable and welcoming.”*
- *“It's big enough to have lots of great resources but small enough you get to know teachers and staff as well as many of your class mates. I'd definitely keep it on your list to apply to.”*
- *“I would tell them its an excellent college to attend, because you get friendly classmates and faculty. The classes are the perfect size for someone who likes one on one time with the teacher.”*
- *“It's really nice here and the scenery here when you're sitting at a picnic table is a beautiful distraction to keep stress free. Potomac State has a lot of wonderful classes to enjoy learning more about your career cluster and future job. There is a lot of things to do with different activities if you decide to go to them.*
- *“PSC is small, but makes you feel apart of something bigger. Everyone is super nice and you just feel like one big family.”*

SOPHOMORE

- *“It's a great school especially for starting out. They work with you to achieve your goals.”*
- *“I is a quality school. Its like going to WVU but on a smaller, more efficient scale.”*
- *“An amazing learning environment.”*
- *“Small classes, close walking distance from class to class, VERY dedicated instructors, every single one I have come into contact with has been truly passionate about the subject they are teaching. I am speaking of the staff as well...as much if not more at times, I am NOT exaggerating. I know this school cares about me and my future and it means a lot to me.”*
- *“It's a smaller laid back school where the professors actually care about you and remember you.”*
- *“Small and student oriented, beautiful campus, caring staff and community.”*
- *“It's a small place but has great potential and focuses on one on one learning.”*



VERBATIMS BY CLASS

JUNIOR

- *“A very integrated and collective environment where students and learn more about themselves and others in a caring and compassionate environment.”*
- *“WVU Potomac State College is a big university on a smaller campus with faculty that genuinely care about their students and know their names.”*
- *“It is a convenient option for college because they care about your work life as well as your school life and you aren’t drowning in work and debt.”*
- *“Great learning environment, friendly staff, small classes, great campus.”*
- *“Its like a whole new family. The atmosphere is great and academic part of it is just outstanding. The teachers treat you like adults, but also like there children at the same time. Success is what the faculty strive to give us and they give it there all to help us succeed.”*
- *“Small classrooms with the same benefits of a large campus.”*

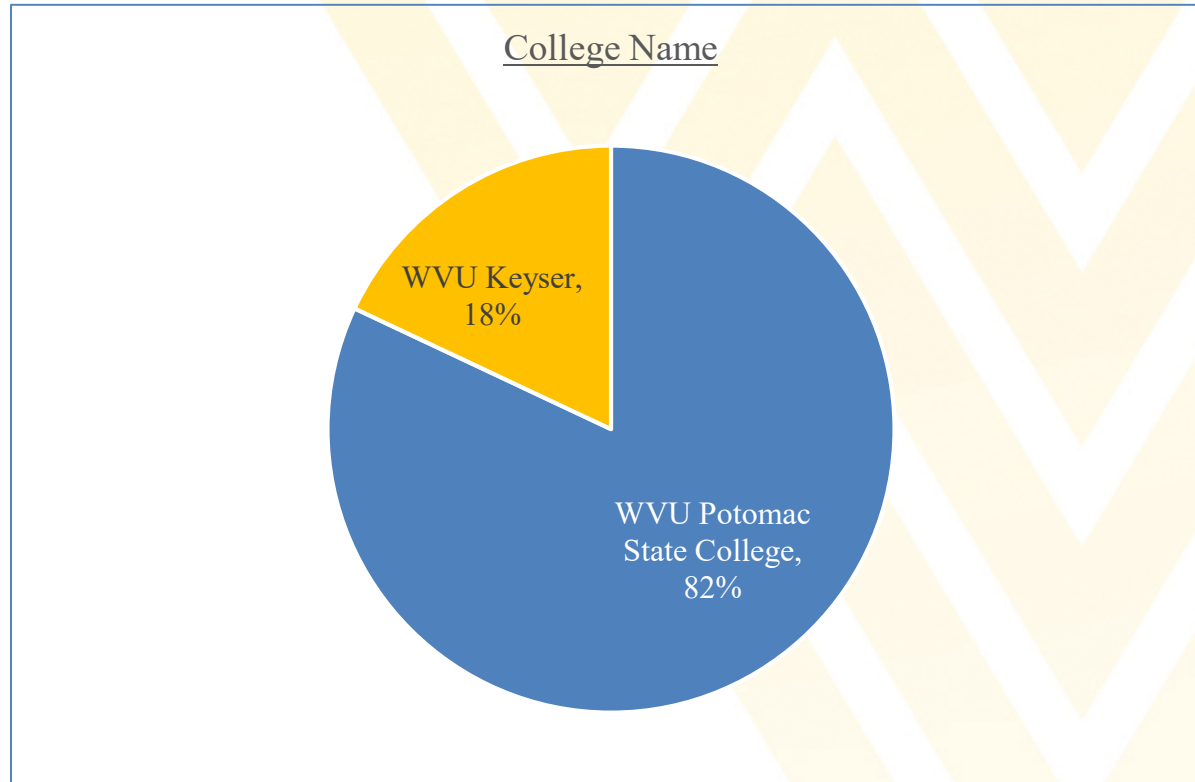
SENIOR

- *“Great education at an affordable price. If you don't know if college is for you, Pot State is a good campus to see if it's for you.”*
- *“Student oriented, cares about the students, guides the students into a successful future.”*
- *“Small campus where you matter to faculty.”*
- *“It’s small and in a cute, beautiful little town. An easy get away to focus on your education.”*
- *“Small town, close knit, well rounded stepping stone to University.”*
- *“I’d say that that it is very cute and homey and is surrounded by beautiful scenery.”*



PREFERRED NAME

An overwhelming number of students (82%) believe that the name “WVU Potomac State College” better reflects a tie to West Virginia University than “WVU Keyser” does.



Q. Over the past few years, our school has been referred to as "WVU Potomac State College" and WVU Keyser." Which name do you feel shows a stronger tie to West Virginia University?